

# CHAPTER 27

## INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY 27

In this chapter the people of Israel are ordered to write the law on plastered stones, and set them on Mount Ebal, (<sup><1870></sup>Deuteronomy 27:1-4); where they are bid to erect an altar, and offer sacrifices on it, (<sup><1875></sup>Deuteronomy 27:5-8); and are charged by Moses and the priests to obey the Lord, and keep his commandments, (<sup><1879></sup>Deuteronomy 27:9,10); and a direction is given to each tribes which should stand and bless, and which curse, and where, (<sup><1871></sup>Deuteronomy 27:11-13); and the curses which the Levites should pronounce with a loud voice, and the people should say Amen to, are recited, (<sup><1874></sup>Deuteronomy 27:14-25); and the whole is concluded with a curse on all who in general do not perform the whole law, (<sup><1876></sup>Deuteronomy 27:26).

**Ver. 1.** *And Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying,* etc.] The seventy elders, at the head of whom was Moses, which made the great sanhedrim, or council of the nation; Moses having recited all the laws of God to the people, these joined with him in an exhortation to them to observe and obey them:

*keep all the commandments which I command you this day;* not in his own name, as being the supreme legislator, but in the name of the Lord, whom they had avouched to be their God and King, from whom he had received them.

**Ver. 2.** *And it shall be, on the day when you shall pass over Jordan,* etc.] Not the precise day exactly, but about that time, a little after they passed that river, as soon as they conveniently could; for it was not till after Ai was destroyed that the following order was put in execution; indeed as soon as they passed over Jordan, they were ordered to take twelve stones, and did; but then they were set up in a different place, and for a different purpose; (see <sup><1818></sup>Joshua 4:3,8,9 8:31);

*unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones;* not in Jordan, as Jarchi, but on Mount Ebal,

(<sup>(1270)</sup>Deuteronomy 27:4); nor had the stones set up in Jordan any such inscription as what is here ordered to be set on these:

*and plaster them with plaster*: that so words might be written upon them, and be more conspicuous, and more easily read.

**Ver. 3.** *And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law*, etc.] Not the whole book of Deuteronomy, as some think, at least not the historical part of it, only what concerns the laws of God; and it may be only a summary or abstract of them, and perhaps only the ten commandments. Josephus<sup>f481</sup> is of opinion that the blessings and the curses after recited were what were written on them:

*when thou art passed over*; that is, the river Jordan:

*that thou mayest go in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, a land flowing with milk and honey*; this account of the land of Canaan is so frequently observed, to imprint upon their minds a sense of the great goodness of God in giving them such a fruitful country, and to point out to them the obligation they lay under to observe the laws of God ordered to be written on plastered stones, as soon as they came into it:

*as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee*; (<sup>(1188)</sup>Exodus 3:8).

**Ver. 4.** *And therefore it shall be, when ye be gone over Jordan*, etc.] Some time after they had passed that river:

*[that] ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Ebal*; a mountain near Shechem in Samaria, and was, as Benjamin of Tudela says<sup>f482</sup>, dry as stones and rocks itself, and perhaps had its name, as some think<sup>f483</sup>, from the root in the Arabic language which signifies to strip a tree of its leaves, and a derivative from it, white stones and a mountain in which such are found. Hither the stones commanded to be set up were to be brought, and fixed here; from whence it is not certain; it may be from some part of the mountain. Here the Samaritan version has Gerizim instead of Ebal, which is generally thought to be a wilful corruption of the Samaritans, in favour of their temple built at Gerizim:

*and thou shall plaster them with plaster*; as before directed, (<sup>(1272)</sup>Deuteronomy 27:2).

**Ver. 5.** *And there shall thou build an altar to the Lord thy God*, etc.] On the same mountain, though not of the same stones. Jarchi's note is,

“after that (the setting up of the plastered stones) thou shalt bring from thence (from Jordan) others, and build of them an altar on Mount Ebal;”

but Josephus<sup>f484</sup> places this altar not on Mount Ebal, but between that and Gerizim. This altar, he says, was ordered to be built towards the rising sun, not far from the city of Shechem, between two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal; but the text is express, that it was to be built where the stones were set up, which was on Mount Ebal, and there it was built, (<sup><0080></sup>Joshua 8:30); an altar of stones; of whole stones, as in (<sup><0276></sup>Deuteronomy 27:6), not broken, nor hewed, but rough as they were when taken out of the quarry:

*thou shalt not lift up [any] iron [tool] upon them;* to hew them, and make them smooth; (see Gill on “<sup><0215></sup>Exodus 20:25”);

**Ver. 6.** *Thou shalt build the altar of the Lord thy God of whole stones,* etc.] And of such Joshua did build it, (<sup><0081></sup>Joshua 8:31);

*and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord thy God;* and very likely sin offerings too; for these frequently went together, the one to make atonement for sin, and the other as a gift, and by way of thankfulness for the acceptance of the former; and both typical of Christ, the true sacrifice, and the antitype of all the legal sacrifices.

**Ver. 7.** *And thou shalt offer peace offerings,* etc.] Part of which belonged to God, which was burnt on the altar, and another part to the priest that offered them; and the rest to the owner that brought them, which he eat of with his friends; so it follows:

*and shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord thy God:* now this altar, where these sacrifices were offered, was on the very spot where the stones were on which the law was written; and may point at the gracious provision God has made for the redemption of his people from the curse of it by Christ, who became a substitute for them in their legal place and stead. The altar being of rough unhewn stones was a type of him in his human nature, who is the stone in the vision cut out of the mountain without hands; and being unpolished may denote the meanness of his outward appearance, on account of which he was rejected by the Jewish builders; and no iron tool being to be lifted up on them, may signify that nothing of man’s is to be added to the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ, and salvation by him; and this being in Ebal, where the curses were pronounced, shows that Christ, by the offering up of himself for the sins of

his people, has made atonement for them, and thereby has delivered them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them; all which is matter of joy and gladness to them.

**Ver. 8.** *And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law,* etc.]

Not upon the stones of the altar, but upon the first stones brought to Mount Ebal, and set up there before, and on which the words were inscribed before the altar was erected; though according to the Misnah<sup>f485</sup> the altar was built of these stones, and on that the law written; for it is said,

“they shall bring the stones ((<sup><487></sup>Deuteronomy 27:2,4)) and build the altar, and plaster it with plaster, and write upon it all the words of the law:”

with which Josephus agrees, who says<sup>f486</sup>,

“that when Moses was about to die, he ordered the blessings and the curses to be written on the altar, on both sides of it:”

could this be made clearly to appear, it would be easy to observe the accomplishment of it in Christ, who was made under the law, became subject to it, had it written on his heart, obeyed the precepts and bore the penalty of it, and had all the curses of it laid on him, and thereby redeemed his people from them. However, be it on which it may that the words of the law were written, they were written

*very plainly*; so that they might be easily read; in seventy languages, according to the Jewish writers; which they say was done, that whoever would learn the law might learn it, and so the Gentiles had no excuse<sup>f487</sup>; for it is a prevailing notion with them, that there were so many nations and languages. The law being written on stones denotes the duration of it, which continued not only during the times of the Old Testament dispensation, and to the times of John, and had its fulfilment in Christ, but still continues; for though Christ has redeemed his people from the curse and condemnation of it, yet it is in his hands as a rule of direction to them as to their walk and conversation: nor is it made void by any doctrine of the Gospel, and nothing more strongly enforces obedience to it than the Gospel. The moral law is immutable, invariable, and eternal in its nature, and in the matter of it. This may also point at the hardness of men’s hearts, their non-subjection to the law, and disobedience of it; and these stones being covered with plaster may be an emblem of formalists and hypocrites, who are like whited walls and sepulchres, (<sup><487></sup>Matthew 23:27), have a

form of the law in their heads, but not in their hearts; are Jews outwardly, but not inwardly, (<sup>4128</sup>Romans 2:28); externally righteous before men, as if they were strict observers of the law, but internally very wicked; and have hard, blind, and impenitent hearts, under the cover of the law, and a profession of strict regard to it; and this being done on the same mount where the curses were pronounced, shows that they were on account of the breach of this law.

**Ver. 9.** *And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel*, etc.] The priests who were Levites, as all the priests that were lawful ones were; and there were none but such at this time, who were. Eleazar and Ithamar, and their sons; these joined with Moses in the following exhortations to the people of Israel, as being particularly concerned in instructing them in the knowledge of the laws, and in seeing them put in execution:

*saying, take heed, and hearken, O Israel*; to what was about to be said unto them, as well as to what had: been said:

*this day thou art become the people of the Lord thy God*; they were his people before; he had chosen them to be his special people above all others; he had redeemed them out of Egypt; he had led them through the wilderness, and provided for them and protected them there, and had given them laws and statutes to observe to walk in; all which showed them to be his peculiar people: but now in a very formal and solemn manner they were avouched and declared by him to be his people, and they had solemnly avouched and declared that he was their God and King; and every day, according to Jarchi, was to be considered as this day, as if it was the day of entering into covenant with him.

**Ver. 10.** *Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God*, etc.] In whatsoever he directs in his word, and by his prophets, and especially by his Son, eminently called the Word of the Lord:

*and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day*; (see Gill on <sup>4129</sup>Deuteronomy 27:1”).

**Ver. 11.** *And Moses charged the people the same*, etc.] That he gave the above orders to set up stones, and plaster them, and write the law on them, and build an altar in the same place, and offer sacrifices when come into the land of Canaan:

*saying*; as follows.

**Ver. 12.** *These shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people, widen ye are come over Jordan,* etc.] Which was a mountain in Samaria opposite to Mount Ebal, a valley of a furlong broad lay between them <sup>f488</sup>; and, according to Hillerus <sup>f489</sup>, had its name from being broken off from that, they being, as it should seem, originally one mountain, and now two tops of the same; so Burchard; but others think it signifies the mountain of the mowers or cutters down <sup>f490</sup>; that is, of grass or corn, being a very fruitful one; and Benjamin of Tudela says <sup>f491</sup>, that in his time, on Mount Gerizim were fountains and orchards; and being such a fertile mountain, it was very proper to bless upon. Mr. Maundrel <sup>f492</sup>, a late traveller in those parts, says,

“though neither of the mountains have much to boast of as to their pleasantness, yet as one passes between them, Gerizim seems to discover a somewhat more verdant fruitful aspect than Ebal; the reason of which may be, because fronting towards the north it is sheltered from the heat of the sun by its own shade; whereas Ebal looking southward, and receiving the sun that comes directly upon it, must by consequence be rendered more scorched and unfruitful.”

Josephus <sup>f493</sup> says, that Gerizim was on the right hand, and Ebal on the left; which may serve to strengthen the observation of Ainsworth, in allusion hereunto, that in the last judgment those on the right hand will be pronounced blessed, and those on the left hand cursed:

*Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin:* these appointed for blessing were children of the mistress, or free woman, as Aben Ezra and many others have observed; the four first were the sons of Leah, and the two last the sons of Rachel, and therefore employed in the most honourable and desirable service: and who so proper to pronounce or receive the blessing as the children of the free woman, of Jerusalem above, which is free, the mother of us all that are born again, and are made free by the Son of God, and are free indeed, and are entitled to all the blessings of grace and glory?

**Ver. 13.** *And these shall stand upon Mount Ebal curse,* etc.] Which was dry and rocky, barren and fruitful, and like the earth, that bears briars and thorns, is rejected and nigh unto cursing, and so a proper place to curse, and a fit emblem of those to be cursed; (see <sup><sup>808</sup></sup> Hebrews 6:8);

*Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali;* four of these appointed for cursing were the children of the handmaids, Gad, Asher,

Dan, and Naphtali; and since two were wanting, as Aben Ezra observes, and the sons of Leah were many, the oldest and the youngest were taken; Reuben, who had defiled his father's bed, and exposed himself to the curse of the law, and Zebulun, the last and youngest of Leah's sons; (see <sup><8B0></sup>Galatians 3:10 4:24,30).

**Ver. 14.** *And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel,* etc.] Rather, “answer<sup>f494</sup> and say”; not the whole tribe of Levi, for that stood on Mount Gerizim to bless, (<sup><87D></sup>Deuteronomy 27:12); but the priests of that tribe who were placed in the valley, between the two mountains, and pronounced both the blessings and the curses in the hearing of all the tribes of Israel, to which they were to answer Amen; and that they might plainly hear, they expressed their words

*with a loud voice*, clearly and distinctly, as follow.

**Ver. 15.** *Cursed [be] the man that maketh [any] graven or molten image,* etc.] The blessings and the form of them are not recorded, because they were not to be had from the law, and through obedience to it; and therefore there is a profound silence about them, to put men upon seeking for them elsewhere, and which are only to be had in Christ, especially spiritual ones; but we may suppose they were delivered in the same form, and respecting the same things as the curses, only just the reverse of them; as, “blessed is the man that maketh not any graven image”, etc. The order of both is given in the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem; (see Gill on <sup><8129></sup>Deuteronomy 11:29”). This curse respects the breach of the first table of the law, and everything included in it relating to the nature and being of God, the worship of him, and the honour of his name; to do anything contrary to which, particularly to make an image, whether graven or molten, to worship, is

*an abomination to the Lord*; and therefore subjects a man to the curse of his law, it being

*the work of the hands of the craftsman*; and therefore it must be a most stupid thing to ascribe deity to it, and worship it as such:

*and putteth [it] in [a] secret [place]*; though it is not set in a place of public worship, or the house, so as to be seen by everyone; but in some retired place, in a secret chamber, and there worshipped, or kept to look at with pleasure; which would be a temptation, and lead on to idolatry, and therefore is forbidden, and to be guarded against: now one that committed

idolatry, or anything like it, in the most secret manner, was liable to this curse; for the omniscient God, the legislator, knows what is done in the most private manner, and will resent and revenge every affront and injury to his honour and glory. And Aben Ezra observes, that all that follow respect things done in a secret way, and which were not cognizable by the civil magistrate, and therefore to deter persons from them these curses were pronounced:

*and all the people shall answer and say Amen*; even those on the one mountain as on the other, thereby approving of, and assenting to, the justice of the sentence pronounced.

**Ver. 16.** *Cursed [be] he that setteth light by his father, or his mother*, etc.] That secretly despises them in his heart, and by looks and gestures mocks at them in a private manner, unseen by others, (<sup>3817</sup>Proverbs 30:17); for if he publicly cursed them, that was cognizable by the civil magistrate, and he was to be put to death, (<sup>4819</sup>Leviticus 20:9). This follows next, as in the order of the ten commands, to that which respects the fear and worship of God; honouring parents being next to the glorifying of God, the Father of all:

*and all the people shall say Amen*; applaud the righteous sentence, saying, “so let it be”.

**Ver. 17.** *Cursed [be] he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark*, etc.] Removes it backward, and steals ground, as Jarchi explains it; this is commonly done secretly; (see <sup>4594</sup>Deuteronomy 19:14);

*and all the people shall say Amen*; (see Gill on “<sup>4625</sup>Deuteronomy 27:15-16”).

**Ver. 18.** *Cursed [be] he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way*, etc.] By directing him wrong knowingly, or laying a stumbling block in his way, (<sup>4894</sup>Leviticus 19:14). The Targum of Jonathan is,

“that maketh a traveller wander out of the way, who like a blind man;”

who knows his way no more than a blind man does. Jarchi interprets it,

“that blinds in anything, and gives evil counsel;”



which leads men to take wrong steps, whether in things civil, or moral, or religious; all which are usually done privately:

*and all the people shall say Amen;* (see Gill on “<sup><6715></sup>Deuteronomy 27:15-16”).

**Ver. 19.** *Cursed [be] he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow,* etc.] Who have none to assist them, and take their part, and therefore judges may be tempted to do an unjust thing; but God is the patron of them, and takes notice of every injury done them, and is the avenger of all such:

*and all the people shall say Amen;* (see Gill on “<sup><6715></sup>Deuteronomy 27:15-16”).

**Ver. 20.** *Cursed [be] he that lieth with his father’s wife,* etc.] As Reuben did, and which is forbidden (<sup><6818></sup>Leviticus 18:8);

*because he uncovereth his father’s skirt;* (see <sup><6231></sup>Deuteronomy 22:30);

*and all the people shall say Amen;* the tribe of Reuben said this as well as the rest.

**Ver. 21.** *Cursed [be] he that lieth with any manner of beast,* etc.] (see <sup><6823></sup>Leviticus 18:23);

*and all the people shall say Amen;* as being shocking and abhorrent to human nature.

**Ver. 22.** *Cursed [be] he that lieth with his sister,* etc.] Which is forbid, (<sup><6819></sup>Leviticus 18:9);

*the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother;* whether his sister by father or mother’s side:

*and all the people shall say Amen;* detesting such uncleanness.

**Ver. 23.** *Cursed [be] he that lieth with his mother in law,* etc.] (see <sup><6817></sup>Leviticus 18:7,8). All these incestuous or brutal copulations may well be supposed to be done in secret:

*and all the people shall say Amen;* as abhorring such incest.

**Ver. 24.** *Cursed [be] he that smiteth his neighbour secretly,* etc.] And kills him, and the murder is not known; the curse of God follows such, and

overtakes them sooner or later. Some interpret this of smiting with the tongue, of secret backbiting and slander; so the Targum of Jonathan,

“that smiteth with the third tongue;”

or false accusation:

*and all the people shall say Amen*; as disapproving of and condemning such a practice, even slander, and especially murder.

**Ver. 25.** *Cursed [be] he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person,* etc.] As an assassin, to murder him privately; or as a judge, that takes a bribe to condemn to death an innocent person: so Aben Ezra observes, that according to the sense of some a judge is meant; but, says he, in my opinion a false witness; one that swears a man’s life away for the sake of a reward given him:

*and all the people shall say Amen*; at so detestable a crime.

**Ver. 26.** *Cursed [be] he that confirmeth not [all] the words of this law to do them,* etc.] That is, who does not perfectly perform all that the law requires, and continues to do so; for the law requires obedience, and that perfect and constant, and in failure thereof curses, in proof of which the apostle produces this passage, (see Gill on “<sup><R10></sup>Galatians 3:10”), for the reconciliation of these Scriptures, as to what seeming difference there is between them;

*and all the people shall say, Amen*; (see Gill on “<sup><R15></sup>Deuteronomy 27:15-16”).